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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 VATICAN 002291

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EUR/WE (MENUTTI)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/09/2012

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SUBJECT: RUSSIANS IN ROME SAY ORTHODOX/VATICAN TENSIONS ARE
AT HIGHEST LEVEL IN YEARS

CLASSIFIED BY: AMBASSADOR JIM NICHOLSON FOR REASONS 1.5 (A) AND (D).

1. (C) SUMMARY: OVER THE COURSE OF THE LAST FEW WEEKS, DCM
MET SEPARATELY WITH FATHER MARCEL GUARNIZO, PRESIDENT OF
THE AID TO THE CHURCH IN RUSSIA, FATHER FILIPP OF THE RUSSIAN
ORTHODOX CHURCH IN ROME, AND DIMITRI SHTODIN, DCM AT THE
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RUSSIAN EMBASSY TO THE HOLY SEE. ALL ASSERT THAT
RUSSIAN/VATICAN RELATIONS ARE AT A 10-YEAR LOW. FATHER
MARCEL BLAMES IT ON THE INCREASING INSECURITY OF PATRIARCH
ALEXI AND RUSSIAN ORTHODOX "FOREIGN MINISTER" KYRILL. FATHER
FILIPP STATES THAT THE PROBLEM IS THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH'S
"AGGRESSIVE" PROSELYTISM, WHILE SHTODIN SEES IT AS A
MANIFESTATION OF AN ETHNIC RUSSIAN/ETHNIC POLE CONFRONTATION
WITHIN THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION. NONE OF THE THREE SEE ANY
SHORT-TERM IMPROVEMENT. END SUMMARY

THE VIEW OF THE RUSSIAN CHURCH IN ROME

2. (C) THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH IN ROME WAS A SMALL,
DISCREET CONGREGATION UNTIL THE LATE 1980'S. FOUNDED BY
"WHITE RUSSIANS", IT USE TO EASILY ACCOMMODATE ITS LESS THAN
300 MEMBERS IN ITS CHURCH LOCATED IN THE CENTER OF ROME.
HOWEVER, BECAUSE OF THE INFLUX OF SERBS, RUSSIANS, AND
UKRAINIANS INTO ROME SINCE THE EARLY 1990'S, THERE WERE OVER
1,000 PEOPLE AT ORTHODOX EASTER SUNDAY MASS ON MAY 5, WITH
THE OVERFLOW CROWD FILLING THE SURROUNDING STREETS. THE
CONGREGATION HOPES TO HAVE A SECOND CHURCH BUILDING ON THE
RUSSIAN EMBASSY COMPOUND IN 2003, WHERE A LARGE CHURCH IS
CURRENTLY BEING CONSTRUCTED. THERE ARE THREE PRIESTS AT THE
CHURCH, FATHER FILIPP, FATHER MIKAIL, AND FATHER ALEKSEY. DCM
MET MOST RECENTLY WITH FATHER FILIPP ON MAY 6 TO DISCUSS HIS
PARTICIPATION IN EMBASSY'S MAY 15-16 ANTI TRAFFICKING
CONFERENCE. FATHER FILIPP AGAIN USED THE OPPORTUNITY TO
COMPLAIN ABOUT VATICAN ACTIONS IN RUSSIA. HE SAID THAT THERE
WILL BE NO IMPROVEMENT IN RELATIONS UNTIL POPE JOHN PAUL II
"LEAVES THE SCENE". HE SAID THAT THE CREATION OF CATHOLIC
DIOCESE IN RUSSIA WAS A GREAT "INSULT" TO THE RUSSIAN CHURCH.
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WHEN ASKED IF THESE WERE NOT NECESSARY TO PROVIDE PASTORAL
CARE FOR CATHOLICS LIVING IN RUSSIA, HE REPLIED THAT THIS
ARGUMENT IS A VATICAN "LIE" AND COVER FOR AGGRESSIVE
PROSELYTATION OF RUSSIANS. HE DESCRIBED RELATIONS AS WORSE
THAN ANYTIME IN THE LAST 20 YEARS.

VIEW OF THE EMBASSY OF RUSSIA TO THE HOLY SEE

3. (C) DURING SEVERAL ENCOUNTERS WITH RUSSIAN EMBASSY DCM
SHTODIN, DCM RAISED STATE OF RUSSIAN/VATICAN RELATIONS.
SHTODIN, WHO VOLUNTEERED THAT HE IS A NON BELIEVER AND DID
NOT FEEL PARTICULARLY CLOSE TO THE ORTHODOX CHURCH, AGREED
ENTIRELY WITH THE SENTIMENTS VOICED BY FATHER FILIPP. HE SAW
NOT ONLY THE CREATION OF DIOCESES AS AN AFFRONT, BUT WHAT HE
DESCRIBED AS THE RECENT VATICAN "VIRTUAL INVASION" OF MOSCOW.
ACCORDING TO SHTODIN, THE RUSSIANS WERE INFORMED THAT THE
VATICAN WOULD DO A LIVE VIDEO LINK FOR THE POPE WITH
SEMINARIANS AT THE CATHEDRAL IN MOSCOW. THE ARCHBISHOP OF
MOSCOW, AGAIN ACCORDING TO SHTODIN, MADE IT A PUBLIC EVENT.
SHTODIN SEES BOTH ETHNICITY AND POLITICS AT WORK ON THE
VATICAN SIDE. HE SAID THAT A MAJORITY OF ROMAN CATHOLICS IN
RUSSIA ARE ETHNIC POLES, AND THAT THOSE IN THE VATICAN WHO
WANT TO RETARD PROGRESS IN VATICAN/RUSSIA RELATIONS ARE
TELLING THE POPE THAT HIS CO-NATIONALS IN RUSSIA ARE BEING
PERSECUTED AND THE VATICAN SHOULD THEREFORE TAKE AN
AGGRESSIVE STAND. HE SINGLED OUT PRIME MINISTER SODANO
AS BEHIND THESE ACTIONS, NOT BECAUSE HE'S CONCERNED WITH
POLISH CATHOLICS IN RUSSIA, BUT TO GAIN SUPPORT IN
ANTICIPATION OF THE NEXT CONCLAVE AMONG CARDINALS LOYAL TO
JOHN PAUL.

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A ROMAN CATHOLIC'S VIEW

4. (C) FATHER MARCEL, PRESIDENT OF AN ORGANIZATION CALLED
"AID TO THE CHURCH IN RUSSIA", CALLED ON DCM ON MAY 1.
HE SAID THAT PERSECUTION OF ROMAN CATHOLICS IN RUSSIA IS AT

ITS WORST LEVEL SINCE THE FALL OF COMMUNISM. HE CLAIMED THAT THERE IS NO PROSELYTIZING, BUT IF AN ETHNIC RUSSIAN WANTS TO INVESTIGATE CATHOLICISM "HE MUST BE RECEIVED". MARCEL STRESSED THAT TO CONTINUE TO PROVIDE PASTORAL SUPPORT FOR ROMAN CATHOLICS IN RUSSIA, IT IS NECESSARY FOR FOREIGN BISHOPS AND PRIESTS TO BE ALLOWED TO ENTER THE COUNTRY. HE MADE A STRONG PLEA FOR PRESIDENT BUSH TO MEET ARCHBISHOP TADEUSZ KONDRUSIEWICZ OF MOSCOW DURING THE PRESIDENT'S UPCOMING TRIP TO RUSSIA.

COMMENT: POST WOULD APPRECIATE HEARING FROM EMBASSY MOSCOW IF SHTODIN'S PERSPECTIVE IS SHARED BY MANY IN THE GOI. EMBASSY VATICAN IS CONVINCED THAT THE HOLY SEE HAS LEGITIMATE PASTORAL CONCERNS IN RUSSIA WHICH NECESSITATE THE PRESENCE OF FOREIGN PRIESTS. THAT SAID, THERE IS SOME INDICATION THAT THE VATICAN IS CALLING FOR A GREATER NUMBER OF PRIESTS PER CATHOLIC CONGREGANTS THAN IS THE NORM IN WESTERN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES. AGAIN, EMBASSY MOSCOW'S VIEW WOULD BE WELCOMED.

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ACTION EUR-00

INFO	LOG-00	NP-00	AID-00	AMAD-00	ACQ-00	CIAE-00	INL-00
	DODE-00	DOEE-00	SRPP-00	DS-00	EB-00	VC-00	H-01
	TEDE-00	INR-00	IO-00	LAB-01	L-00	VCE-00	AC-01
	NSAE-00	NSCE-00	OIC-02	OMB-01	OPIC-01	PA-00	PM-00
	PRS-00	ACE-00	P-00	SCT-00	SP-00	SSO-00	STR-00
	TRSE-00	USIE-00	PMB-00	DSCC-00	PRM-00	DRL-02	G-00
	SAS-00	/009W					

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O 101442Z MAY 02
FM AMEMBASSY VATICAN
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE
INFO AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY ROME

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END COMMENT. NICHOLSON

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